

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

The Skill to Work

Today's work world calls for specialized knowledge, abilities.

"Get a haircut and a job" doesn't cut it as job hunting advice anymore. Today's businesses need skilled workers; today's workers need specialized skills they may not have. In addition to the traditional role of educating students, Land-Grant universities and USDA work together to help our nation's workers hone their skills and expand their horizons.

Payoff

- **Switching gears.** When a clothing plant closed in a rural Kentucky county, unemployment climbed to 23 percent. **Kentucky** Extension offered workshops to help the displaced workers find new jobs – 68 percent of them were successful. **Ohio State** Extension linked with the Godman Guild, a Columbus-based community center, to offer basic computer classes to 50 people, many of them mothers seeking office jobs so they can be with their children in the evening. **Cornell** Extension trained 32 displaced dairy farmers in one county in landscape maintenance; two weeks after training, 21 found full-time jobs or part-time jobs.
- **Boosting diversity.** The nation's diversity is woefully underrepresented working in the media. Only 9 percent of newsroom employees are people of color, and less than 1 percent of media executives are African Americans. To bridge the gap, **Tennessee State** Extension is partnering with The Ida B. Wells Journalism Internship Program to promote excellence in journalism through diversity. Interns have gone on to major in journalism, work on their college newspapers or work in newsrooms, providing a voice for diverse communities. **Florida A&M** is working to increase minorities in the horticulture and landscape industry. Its ornamental horticulture and landscape design and management programs provide internships, cooperative education and financial support for students. Most graduates work in horticulture or have started their own businesses. **South Carolina State** is addressing similar disparity in natural resources careers through a career camp. Attendees showed increased interest in forestry and natural resource careers.
- **Learning from afar.** Workers who live far from campus or don't have time to participate in traditional classes continue to benefit from Land-Grant distance education opportunities. **Nebraska** offers 13 entomology courses via video, CD-

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ROM and the Internet that can be taken for credit or noncredit. Nearly 90 students from 30 states and five countries are enrolled and eight have received degrees. An **Arizona** nutrition class has reached nearly 2,200 students since 1998. Evaluations continue to show that distance-ed students learn as much as their traditional classroom counterparts.

- **Como se dice “work” en Espanol?** As the number of Spanish-speaking people increases nationwide, Land-Grant universities bridge the language gap with classes and publications. **Ohio State** Extension produces an English/Spanish newsletter for Hispanics working in horticulture and published “Spanish for Greenhouse Supervisors,” a collection of words used in floriculture. **Idaho** Extension arranged for-credit Spanish classes for government employees and others. After taking the classes, 75 percent said they were better able to communicate with Spanish-speaking clients. **Purdue** Extension offered “Workplace Spanish,” a two-day course in language skills and cultural awareness, to 22 people who said it increased their understanding of Hispanic culture and their ability to serve their clients.
- **Get a job 101.** Young people looking for their first jobs sometimes lack job-search skills. An **Arizona** work-force preparation effort helped 25 teens land part-time jobs. All participants improved interview skills and 55 percent created their own resumes. **Louisiana State** taught youths how to complete applications, write resumes, dress appropriately and interview successfully. Half of the participants later landed summer jobs. **Georgia** Extension surveyed 4-H alumni to determine which experiences best prepared them for the workplace. Alumni reported they were better able to meet deadlines, manage time, work well with people, keep records, write resumes and practice proper etiquette because of their 4-H experiences. **Texas A&M** Extension sponsors an annual four-day camp for teens who interview business owners, evaluate marketing strategies, write essays, design business cards and develop business plans. Participants increased their business knowledge by 30 percent.
- **You want knowledge with those fries?** Employment for many teens begins in food service. **Montana State** Extension’s Food Safety Works helped students at four schools improve their skills. Some grabbed raises and

others said they had an advantage when applying for food-service jobs. At least 20 other Montana schools want to offer the training to teens. **West Virginia** Extension reached more than 2,000 teens and adults with food handling training last year, emphasizing cross contamination, temperatures, hygiene, cleaning and sanitation. Of those who attended, 99 percent passed the food handling exam and 83 percent said they would apply the principles in their food operations.

- **Help wanted.** Agribusinesses are eager to hire knowledgeable employees. **Nebraska** is boosting agricultural know-how in high schools. Besides helping launch the nation’s first rural agricultural sciences magnet high school, the university offers four courses to seven rural schools via distance education. The enhanced agricultural sciences courses are helping students prepare for careers in agriculture. At one school, enrollment increased 80 percent in 2002-2003.
- **At-risk now at work.** Children who grow up in poverty have a tougher time knowing what it takes to succeed at work. **Mississippi State’s** work-force development program helped more than 1,500 teens learn how to apply for jobs, write resumes, handle interviews, set goals and handle workplace conflict. In another program, teens were paired with senior citizens. The seniors shared their knowledge of the working world while teens taught the adults computer skills. A **Rutgers** Extension program trained 35 New Jersey Youth Corps members with intensive, hands-on training to prepare them for careers in forestry and horticulture. Students increased their use of safety practices and several landed jobs.



**Cooperative State Research, Education,
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